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HISTORY AND LITERATURE

— IN —

GRAMMAR GRADES

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HISTORY AND LITERATURE

IN

GRAMMAR GRADES.

✓ BY

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HISTORY AND LITERATURE IN GRAMMAR GRADES.

THE connection between history and literature is so intimate that the treatment of the latter in its broad sense might include the former, without violence to either. Considering each in its more restricted meaning, however, and particularly in its commonly accepted scholastic sense, the reason for the separation of these subjects in the caption becomes apparent.

In presenting the claims of history and literature to a place in the curriculum of the elementary school, I do not feel that I am advocating the introduction of new subjects into our already too crowded course. History has been assigned a place for many years, in the majority of our schools, and literature has received, at least, a passive recognition. The actual instruction in both has been far from satisfactory; in quantity it has been for the most part nominal and uncertain; in method, aimless and desultory. That these subjects have not been — are not now — adequately appreciated by the vast majority of the educational guild of this country, will be readily conceded.

During the past decade, the methods of instruction in nearly all the other branches of elementary school work have undergone radical changes, and have reached a wide range of development. In the subjects of history and literature, however, it must be admitted that but little if any progress

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has been made in securing systematic instruction, either in matter or method.

In language and arithmetic, we find careful gradation throughout the course ; in every stage of the child's progress, we become conscious of an effort to adapt matter and method to the capabilities of the growing mind, to arouse and develop self-activity by creating an interest in the subject matter. An extended examination of courses of study in different sections of the United States reveals the fact, that in few instances only has there been any serious attempt to apply to history and literature the systematic treatment accorded to other subjects.

The explanation of this fact cannot be found in any inherent difficulties in the subjects themselves. The plaintive question of the venerable Walt Whitman regarding our national literature may have been unconsciously applied by many to our national history, though we should be loath to make the admission. Popular indifference may, perhaps, be partially attributed to the absence in our local and institutional history of the element of antiquity, an element quite necessary to enlist the attention, and take hold of the imagination. Until within recent years, our people have been more actively interested in the making, than in the recording, of history. As a people, we are even yet standing far too near the seething caldron of our later history to form a calm, dispassionate judgment respecting its character and value. Proper perspective will doubtless enhance our interest, both in American history and American literature.

There is still another cause, deeper lying perhaps, but farther reaching in its results.

The curriculum of the common school is not a mere arbitrary or accidental catalogue of subjects: it is a development, a growth, under influences as potent and as complex

as those which have given life and form to our social organism. On the one hand we find those fundamental principles, physiological and psychological, which appertain to the nature and development of mind; those laws of mental action which indicate the relative strength and activity of the several powers at different ages and stages of growth, and dictate the order and methods of training. These factors, so far as understood, within certain limits at least, are definite, universal, and invariable, and must constitute the subjective basis of a rational course of study. On the other hand, we encounter objective conditions and requirements, among which may be mentioned the sphere of activity and environment designed for the child; the time and extent of his education; the spirit of the age, and the demands of public sentiment as dictated by that spirit. These factors, embodying the popular ideal of education, are variable, and are subject to changes and modifications, sometimes radical and revolutionary, always more or less definite and perceptible.

This elasticity of conditions, due so largely to the genius of our American institutions, is in itself an important factor in the progress and development of our national life, as well as of our educational ideals.

Based upon these primary conditions, we find two distinct lines of educational thought, characterizing the two predominant ideals of the century. The one, emphasizing subjective conditions, subordinates the acquisition of mere knowledge or information to the disciplinary value of the studies pursued; the other makes the utility of the subject matter the measure of its disciplinary value. The predominating tendency of the former has been the concentration of all the agencies of education to secure the severe training and exact discipline of the intellectual faculties, leaving the culture of the emotional and executive faculties largely to the accidents of life.

Such subjects as were deemed unsuited to intellectual gymnastics were carefully excluded. History, poetry, and music were laid aside as too trivial and effeminating for men who aspired to intellectual strength. With the rise of the utilitarian ideal, we find in recent years a pronounced tendency towards the opposite extreme. The practical arts as elements in individual and national progress have demonstrated their marvellous power to such an extent, that to-day science is idolized and knowledge is declared omnipotent.

It is not difficult to see that under the sway of these two great educational ideals, history and literature have received but little direct encouragement as branches of school work. Considered by the one inadequate as a means of severe mental training and exact scholarship, and by the other as containing too little promise of immediate utility in the business of life, these subjects have been assigned a subordinate and precarious lodgment in the curriculum of the elementary school.

The tendency has been to relegate the study of literature as such to the high school and the college,—to place it as far as possible beyond the reach of the masses. The value of literature as a means of culture may be admitted, but it is claimed to be beyond the comprehension of pupils below the high school. In the mean time, these pupils take their reading into their own hands, and drift away unwarned into the dangerous shallows of sensational and ephemeral literature. When we remember that only about fifteen per cent of the children in our elementary schools ever reach the high school, it becomes evident that those educational agencies designed to advance the masses, and to conserve the highest interest of the state, must be concentrated in the grammar schools. In the millions of youth in these schools to-day are centred the hopes and the interests of the future. The boys from

these schools, not those from our high schools and colleges, will roll up the future majorities in our great cities. For many years to come, the battle-ground of the republic must be the grammar school, and the instruction here imparted will determine the future battle-cry of American civilization.

It was not without fitness that literature and its allied subjects were called by the ancients the *humanities*. These studies appeal directly to the human element in life, and are calculated to inspire the soul and mould the life more effectively than all the other subjects of our elementary course combined; these are the only studies of the course that are likely to be projected into the child's after-life; they serve to cultivate the affections, to ennable the emotions and the desires,—in short, to purify the springs of human action, and to render secure from pollution the streams of social and national life.

Literature in its comprehensive sense has been defined as the expression of life; history relates to the visible form, the outward expression, while literature in poetry and fiction deals with the throbings of that inner life which animates and beautifies the whole. The interest of both centres in man. History and biography, appealing to individual experience, and exercising the imagination by vivid portrayals of past scenes and incidents, constitute, perhaps, the surest and most direct avenue to the broader fields of literature. This service of history to literature will be admitted; but not so readily recognized is the connection between the other naturally related subjects of the grammar school course and literature, the supplement and complement of all. It is evident that reading, grammar, history, and geography are bound together in a most intimate relationship through the bond of literature. Reading is not *reading*, if it stops satisfied with *word-calling* and a mechanical observation of pauses and

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inflections. That study of United States history which fails to invest the lives of the noble men and heroic women of the past with an interest all absorbing, and to lead the child to appreciate in their proper setting the eloquent and impassioned outbursts of patriotic sentiment, has fallen miserably short of its mission.

If the long and dreary journey through the desert of language and technical grammar fails to vouchsafe, now and then, an encouraging glimpse of the promised land of literature, even if it be beyond the Jordan, much time has been wasted, much energy vainly exhausted. As "all roads lead to Rome," so should all the studies in the grammar school lead to the cultivation of the literary sense as the end and sum of all education below the high school.

The study of history and geography might be profitably united throughout the course. While studying the physical and political characteristics of different countries, let the child learn something of the prominent men and notable events associated with them in history. Call to his aid a few of the heroes and noted travellers of history. Let Alexander, Hannibal, or Napoleon, Captain Cook, Livingston, or Stanley, do service as guides. Let the progressive map of Italy, Greece, or Germany, as it expands before the pupil, become instinct with the living, glowing millions of the past; let those horrid wriggling lines be translated by the imagination into remarkable rivers, lakes, and mountains, associated with deeds of valor and renown, and invested with something of the ancient glory of romance. Both in general and American history the child will thus associate place and circumstance in such relation that the one may recall the other. History and geography as studied independently are wofully abused; in the one, the element of time is unduly emphasized; in the other, that of place. It is in their union we must seek strength.

If need be, let the geography be rewritten, and let the endless list of insignificant places, that have failed in all the centuries to prove interesting to the makers of romance and history, rest silent in deserved obscurity. Winnow, if you will, from the school history much of dry, indigestible detail. Let history and geography be co-ordinated, and the two will move on hand in hand, mutually helpful, mutually inspiring.

But, while much may be accomplished by co-ordinating the more obviously related subjects of the course, and by organizing the instruction in these subjects with reference to literary culture, specific and exclusive attention should be given to history and literature in any well-arranged curriculum.

A brief survey of history-teaching in the grammar grades is all that can be attempted within the limits of this paper. The course in United States history usually covers a period of one or two years. In a few instances we find English history or outlines of general history in the highest grade. Rarely do we find any systematic effort to teach history before the sixth or seventh year of the child's school life.

The increased attention given to this study of late in many of our leading colleges and universities, under the direction of eminent specialists, has revealed three important needs of history-teaching in the grammar school : 1. Better preparation on the part of teachers ; 2. Improved methods of teaching ; 3. Better gradation of the course in history.

Dr. Thorpe, in an article published in 1887, gives the following vivid description of the prevailing method of instruction in history :—

"The teacher assigns a fixed number of pages in the textbook to be memorized ; pupils repeat the text in recitation ; they are examined in the text and the subject is dropped, usually willingly. This method prevails in large cities and in crowded schools, and is the *sine qua non* of every teacher

who is compelled to hear lessons which he does not understand. . . . The result is that thousands pass from these schools with a brief mental incumbrance of names, dates, and isolated events. In some public schools no text-book is used. The teacher not being a special student of history talks text-book on a small scale. The notes of pupils are disconnected statements swept together into a table which is memorized. The recitation is the story after the teacher with unique variations by the child; the text-book abridges the larger work, the teacher abbreviates the text-book, and the child abbreviates the teacher." Dr. Thorpe's conclusion is anything but flattering: "In these schools for elementary instruction, the study of American history as at present conducted is, with few exceptions, time wasted, money wasted, energy wasted, history perverted, and intelligent elementary knowledge of elementary history prevented."

This picture is doubtless true enough to-day, though the past five years have wrought progress in many schools. The grammar school teacher of to-day is not a specialist; existent conditions preclude such a possibility. In the majority of our schools the grammar school teacher is required to give instruction in almost the entire circle of the arts, and is expected to include in her mental equipment the elements of all knowledge. The salary received in most instances is barely sufficient to justify respectable subsistence, much less afford the luxury of extended travel and study. Yet some of the overworked, underpaid grammar school teachers I wot of, do excellent work even in history, better, perhaps, than many a university specialist could do, in the grammar school.

But while we cannot emphasize too much the need of better preparation and better methods for the teacher, faulty instruction may be oftentimes attributed to the arrangement of the course of study. Good history-teaching in the gram-

mar grades must have its roots deep in the primary. We must recognize the fact that the study of history, like that of language and arithmetic, is essentially progressive in its character; gradation should be adapted to the several stages in the development of the historical sense. To place in the hands of a grammar school pupil an advanced text-book in history without previous instruction, without securing even a mental attitude favorable to the study is a blunder, second only to the placing of technical grammar in the hands of a primary language tyro.

If the childhood of man repeats in miniature the childhood of the race, and the education of the individual proceeds upon lines parallel with those of humanity, as Herbert Spencer tells us, we may get from history itself a valuable suggestion with regard to the development of the historical sense. With the child as with the race, a vivid imagination revels amid fairy tales and legends of wonderful beings, superhuman in size and power. To the nursery and the kindergarten belongs this the first stage of history teaching.

Chronology, geography, and biography, time, place, and personality, are the primary essentials of history. The child cannot grasp these relations simultaneously. The chronological sequence of past events is too abstract a conception for the beginner: the effort to locate the story weights down the imagination too much; the personal element alone attracts and dominates the fancy during the first two years of school life. In the third and fourth years, we may expect the element of place to combine naturally with that of personality; and geography and biography constitute the vehicles of history teaching. Any adequate conception of orderly sequence in the great past is as yet too vast for his mental grasp, though the story may expand into an elaborate narrative, and the personal sketch into a respectable biography.

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During the next two years, the three elements are called into requisition, the fragmentary accumulations of former stages, in which the child now feels something of a proprietary interest, may be reproduced and supplemented, and the whole crystallized into a connected narrative.

In the last stage of the grammar school the deeper and more philosophical relations of history will be appreciated. The facts of history may be examined in their general relations, as conditions and results, causes and effects. The simpler generalizations may be derived and their more obvious applications utilized, while the philosophy of history, in its wider generalizations and applications to social and political science, must be reserved for high school and college.

Time will not permit me to touch upon text-books or specific methods. My effort must be confined to this simple outline of the basis of a course in history as indicated in the development of the historical sense. If the course be thus begun in the primary, the study will prove more fruitful in results, both as a means of mental discipline and as a practical guide in the duties and exigencies of life.

I have dwelt thus at some length upon history because it is recognized as the doorway to general literature; besides, what has been said with regard to the development of the historic sense applies with equal force to the development of literary taste, particularly in the primary grades, where the foundation must be securely laid.

DeQuincey classifies literature into two great divisions, the literature of information, and the literature of power, or inspiration. The latter now claims our attention. How shall we cultivate in our grammar schools a taste for that class of literature which inspires the soul and ennobles character?

Many plans and devices have been suggested, and tried with varying degrees of success. In many schools the old system of numbered readers has been either supplanted or supplemented by the introduction of continuous selections from our best English and American authors. The celebration of authors' days in many schools has proven an excellent method of impressing upon the mind the character and personality of eminent men of letters, and of familiarizing the children with their works. The spasmodic character and the "celebration" feature of this method, however, constitute an artificial stimulus, not entirely favorable to the formation of the "reading habit," unless supplemented by more permanent and continuous work.

Another effort, assuming various forms and proportions according to circumstances and local surroundings, may be termed the "library method."

It is not my purpose to examine specifically into the merits of the several methods suggested. Their existence serves to emphasize the conviction that the need of special instruction in literature is most urgent, and is a virtual admission of the fact that the teaching of English in our schools to-day is a failure, so far as it concerns the cultivation of literary taste. We give ample time to English in our grammar schools; reading, language, grammar, and composition,—the related English studies,—occupy nearly one-half the child's time in school. Are the results at all commensurate with this vast effort? A very large per centum of our pupils pass through our grammar schools, and even enter our colleges, without mastery of the rudiments of language, with no facility of expression in their own vernacular, and with no appreciation of the wealth and splendor of the literature within their grasp. Is it not possible that our language teaching is too cold, abstract, and technical? that

our aims are too verbal, and our methods too mechanical? In other words, are we not trying to teach all *about* the language and too little *in* and *of* the language itself? We too often content ourselves, it seems to me, with the method of the dissecting-room,—the pupil studies the anatomy of a language that to him is practically dead, so far as its soul-breathing literature is concerned. Such a process may bring dexterity in the mechanical manipulation of words, but it cannot inspire thought. It may develop skill in analysis, but corresponding power of synthesis and the enlargement of the intellectual life do not of necessity follow.

Far from decrying technical grammar, I hold it indispensable, as a means of training in the relation of ideas and in the logical analysis of language. As a science, it has its place; but, as a science, it demands that the pupil shall first come face to face with the living facts upon which it is based — the literature of the language.

Could we turn the light of mature experience upon our early school time, and vividly recall our early views of literature, we should feed our pupils less on the dry, unpalatable husks of thought. What wonder some of us were led to conclude that the masterpieces of Jefferson and Webster, Clay and Calhoun, were written expressly for the big boys to declaim on Friday afternoons; that the fragmentary literature with which the pages of the grammar were so generously sprinkled had been generated for the sole purpose of illustrating rules of syntax. Yet these "*disjecta membra*" of poet, orator, and essayist constituted the sole literary equipment of the millions who left the district school of the long ago to enter upon life's duties.

But many of us cherish tender memories of the old school reader. The fragments read and memorized in school-time may have been enigmas then, but how often since have they

flowered into consciousness and power. How often since have we been surprised and delighted to recognize our old familiar friends, when met by chance, no longer isolated nomads, but at home, in the pages of Irving, Wirt, or Webster; Dickens, Scott, or Bulwer; Wordsworth, Bryant, or Longfellow.

But the old school reader has been dethroned: it holds to-day but partial sway in our city and village schools. A literary scrap-book, it may serve as a hand-book of elocution, a drill manual in the mechanical process of reading; but it creates no lasting interest in literature, cultivates no taste for continuous reading. Let the reform go on; let the grammar-school pupil read with the teacher some of the old masterpieces bequeathed by the children of the past; introduce "Robinson Crusoe," the "Swiss Family," and "Gulliver;" Whittier, Longfellow, or Tennyson; Irving, Scott, or Hawthorne. Begin in the lowest primary with the substitution of suitable child literature for the insipid commonplaces and worthless inanities of the average primary reader. Let the literary taste be developed by natural stages from the primary to the high school, and the pupil will leave school having an intimate acquaintance with a few great masters of thought and style, with more exalted views of life, with judgment strengthened, taste cultivated, and desire ablaze for truth and beauty. The reading of a few great masterpieces in their integrity, with sole reference to their enjoyment and appreciation as literature, should both precede and accompany verbal drills and grammatical analyses.

True culture does not consist simply in the development of the reasoning faculty or the power of discrimination in the subtleties and trivial niceties of technical learning. The child has sentiments, feelings, and emotions; an innate love of the beautiful, the true, and the sublime; a yearning for

immortality, an impulse to the ideal and the perfect. Shall we emphasize the grosser faculties of the mind, and neglect these, the divine part of his nature?

Frederick von Schlegel, in his "Philosophy of History," has the following admirable passage to the point:—

"There can be no comprehensive culture of the human mind, no high and harmonious development of its powers, and the various faculties of the soul, unless all those deep feelings of life — that mighty productive energy of human nature, the marvellous imagination — be awakened and excited, and by that excitement and exertion attain an expansive, noble, and beautiful form. Were the mental culture of any people founded solely on a dead, cold, abstract science, to the exclusion of all poetry in action or thought, such a mere mathematical people, with minds thus sharpened and pointed by mathematical discipline, would never possess a rich and various intellectual existence; nor even probably attain to a living science, or a true science of life."

In illustration of this argument, an eminent authority has suggested a comparison of the philological methods of two representative American universities. The high standard of exact scholarship in the one, made possible the most critical analysis and laborious research upon a few lines of Horace or Sophocles, while the beauties of thought, sentiment, and style were passed with scant attention. Its graduates have been celebrated as exact scholars, and prodigies of intellectual acumen, but they have contributed little to the enrichment of the world's literature. The other imparted a more generous culture of the imagination and the feelings, and gave to the world a Prescott, a Holmes, a Longfellow, and a Lowell.

The two dominating educational ideals exist side by side in the modern school, now diverging into extremes, now con-

verging, and uniting through a series of compromises, but seldom fusing in harmonious coalescence.

If the exclusively disciplinary use of the old school reader constitutes one extreme, the other extreme may be seen in the reactionary and unwise substitution of information readers, science readers, the newspaper, and manuals of current events,—all falsely labelled as literature. If the one emphasizes intellectual gymnastics at the risk of mental starvation, the other may simply tickle the palate with modern sweet-meats, in the name of utility, to the fatal exclusion of wholesome nutriment.

If, on the one hand, there is danger of emphasizing the exclusively disciplinary ideal in the grammar school stage by introducing Latin, algebra, and geometry, there is danger, on the other, of enfeebling the curriculum with a dilute mixture of commercial and industrial branches. The simple terms, "commercial" and "industrial," possess a potent charm to the educational as well as the popular ear; and we must make room for Commercial Book-keeping, Commercial Stenography, Commercial Savings Banks, and even "Commercial German," with "Reciprocity Spanish" doubtless to come in later; we must make room for industrial drawing, industrial science, and the whole round of "industrial-isms," vaguely accredited to Manual Training. This diversity of instruction is incompatible with intensity. No wonder our common schools are so often charged with the overproduction of moral debility and mental mediocrity, when the curriculum is crowded to the verge of feebleness and teaching energy is so effectually dissipated! No wonder the great educational essentials, the mould of humanity and the glory of civilization, must be abandoned, while we open wide our doors to a throng of modern marvels to convince ourselves of progress.

The gravest danger of our educational system to-day lies

in the effort to make the common school subserve too many specific purposes. The wrecks of the schools of antiquity admonish us against this error. The failure of popular elementary education in ages past has been chiefly due to the effort to subserve some selfish aim, some immediate purpose. Compensation for the neglect of certain powers of the human soul was often sought in the over-education of others; the unique product too often consists of an intellectual giant combined with a moral imbecile, or an intellectual dwarf with massive but unorganized and impotent information.

We need to-day in our common schools the counteracting influence of those studies which will exert a direct influence upon the moral conduct of life. Far better omit the rigid drill in advanced arithmetic and technical grammar, if need be, than to send out the millions of youth now in our schools, to assume the duties and responsibilities of life, without the aid to character building obtained from the examples of noble lives recorded in history and biography; without inspiration to noble living drawn from the visions of beauty and moral loveliness presented in literature. It is not enough to teach reading: ability to read is a power that grows more dangerous day by day. This power in the hands of the child, without direction, may be perverted to the basest of uses, and may prove at the last his one soul-destroying instrumentality. Thomas Arnold did not speak unadvisedly when he said, "I would rather that a son of mine believed that the sun went round the earth, than that he should be entirely deficient in knowledge of beauty, of poetry, and of moral truth."

It is not enough that the child's mind be prepared by a scientific process to receive truth: the seed must be sown, and the tender shoot must be nourished by sunshine, rain, and dew, if we are to expect abundant fruitage in the life.

As the "heirs of all the ages," the youth of America should

be impressed with the value of their inheritance, and the solemn responsibility it entails; they should learn the trite but oft forgotten truth, that the past is our only key to the future ; that

“The unerring voice of Time
Warns us that what hath been, again shall be,
And the broad beacon-flame
Of History casts its light
Upon Futurity.”

When the history of American institutions, and the literature of the English tongue in its most inspiring and enduring forms, become fundamental studies in our common schools, then may we hope for the speedy assimilation of the diverse elements now thronging our shores from every clime, into homogeneous American citizenship; then will the priceless inheritance of the past, cherished in the hearts of a grateful and patriotic people, prove an exhaustless well-spring of individual solace and joy, and the substantial guaranty of social purity and national integrity.



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